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### Strangely calm in 'Dutch' Uruzgan

by RNW Security and Defence specialist Hans de Vreij\*

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Click to listen to the interview with Colonel Richard van Harskamp

**On Monday, four police officers were killed near Tarin Kowt, the capital of the Afghan province of Uruzgan. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. On Friday, a staff sergeant of the US Special Forces was killed in the same region by an improvised explosive device.**

Of all areas in which Dutch troops are deployed, Tarin Kowt is considered the most dangerous. Nevertheless, in many parts of Uruzgan farmers are again tilling the land and Afghans are once again finding the courage to travel for it is much safer than just a short time ago.



Dutch soldier at work in Uruzgan

#### Uruzgan

There have recently been many positive changes in the Afghan province of Uruzgan. There is peace in areas, which recently witnessed heavy fighting. Many places, which were controlled by the Taliban and other rebel groups, are now in the hands of Dutch troops and the Afghan army.

The situation is also peaceful in Chora, which just a year ago was the scene of heavy fighting. The same applies to the district Deh Rawod, previously known as 'the Taliban's home base'.

#### New hustle and bustle

Colonel Richard van Harskamp is commander of the Dutch/Australian Task Force Uruzgan. He agrees that much has changed:

*"Two years ago Tarin Kowt would have looked like a large black stain from where we are now standing. Now lights are burning and there is an enormous hustle and bustle of people engaged in commerce and many kinds of activities - all sorts of things are going on."*

The same can be seen in Deh Rawod Bazar, a village to the south of the Deh Rawod 'green zone'. This agricultural area was captured by the Taliban last autumn. Earlier this year the militias were routed again and now there are lights glowing in the evening and the place is bustling with life.

#### Patrol posts

Local residents and small businessmen believe that it's safe enough to travel through the province. Richard van Harskamp says:

*"People can move around fairly freely here, through the Baluchi Valley to Chora. Last year this was impossible. They can travel to Deh Rawod unhindered. We are on the other side of the Helmand River. If I compare it with where we stood two years ago an unbelievable amount has*

changed."

The many new Afghan police and army posts in the former crisis regions also attest to the new situation. There are also two new Dutch patrol posts on the western bank of the Helmand River. The Australians are constructing a new Afghan police post near the entrance to the Baluchi Valley.

Although there are fewer Taliban and other rebel fighters, soldiers and police officers still encounter roadside bombs. And in the mountains there are frequent sightings of Taliban spotters. Colonel Van Harskamp says there may still be foreign jihadists in the part of Uruzgan where his forces are deployed.



Soldiers - Uruzgan

### Violent culture

Much of the violence occurs just to the north and east of the provincial capital Tarin Kowt, in spite of the fact that large numbers of Afghan and foreign troops are deployed here. But according to Colonel Van Harskamp the violence is not necessarily carried out by Taliban fighters.

*"It's too easy to blame the Taliban. We are in a country whose culture is more violent than the Netherlands. It's difficult to say what is and what is not attributable to the Taliban. Sometimes local militias (are responsible for the violence); sometimes we know for sure that the Taliban are responsible."*

The Dutch Defence Ministry has promised the Task Force Uruzgan that it will increase its intelligence-gathering capabilities and send more special forces. The commander would not say what kind of equipment and manpower is needed since this could play into the hands of the enemy. "The Taliban also listens to Radio Netherlands Worldwide."

*[The Dutch Defence Ministry checked this article in advance for information which could pose a danger to Dutch troops or other allied forces. No changes were made.]*

\* RNW translation (fs)

Tags: Afghanistan, Dutch Defence Ministry, Dutch troops, Richard van Harskamp, Taliban, Tarin Kowt, Task Force Uruzgan, Uruzgan



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### Reaction(s):

Mike, meisterbrau\_65@yahoo.com, 02-07-2008 - USA

Hans, nice article. I'm curious why you neglect to mention all of the infrastructure improvement that Americans are making around Tarin Kowt and other areas of Uruzgan.

Moderator's response:

@ Mike: US infrastructure projects will be the subject of an upcoming article on Uruzgan. Regards, Hans de Vreij.

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